

**Viola (“Mother”) Fletcher
Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor**

**Continuing Injustice: The Centennial of the Tulsa-Greenwood Race Massacre
May 19, 2021**

Written Testimony of Mother Viola Fletcher
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
Wednesday May 19, 2021

My name is Viola Fletcher, or Mother Fletcher. I am the daughter of Lucinda Ellis and John Wesley Ford of Tulsa, Oklahoma. I am the sister of Hughes Van Ellis, who is also here today. And I am a survivor of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Two weeks ago, I celebrated my 107th birthday.

Today, I am in Washington, D.C. for the first time in my life. I am here seeking justice. I am here asking my country to acknowledge what happened in Tulsa in 1921.

On May 31st, 1921, I went to bed in my family's home in the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa. The neighborhood I fell asleep in that night was rich – not just in terms of wealth, but in culture, community, and heritage. My family had a beautiful home. We had great neighbors and I had friends to play with. I felt safe. I had everything a child could need. I had a bright future ahead of me. Greenwood could have given me the chance to truly make it in this country.

Within a few hours, all of that was gone. The night of the Massacre I was woken up by my family. My parents and five siblings were there. I was told we had to leave. And that was it.

I will never forget the violence of the white mob when we left our house. I still see Black men being shot, and Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams. I live through the Massacre every day.

Our country may forget this history. I cannot. I will not. The other survivors do not. And our descendants do not.

When my family was forced to leave Tulsa, I lost my chance at an education. I never finished school past the fourth grade. I have never made much money. My country, state, and city took a lot from me. Despite this, I spent time supporting the war effort in the shipyards of California. But for most of my life, I was a domestic worker serving white families. I never made much money. To this day, I can barely afford my everyday needs. All the while the City of Tulsa have unjustly used the names and stories of victims like me to enrich itself and its White allies through the \$30 million raised by the Tulsa Centennial Commission while I continue to live in poverty.

I am 107 years old and have never seen justice. I pray that one day I will. I have been blessed with a long life – and have seen the best and worst of this country. I think about the horrors inflicted upon Black people in this country every day.

This Subcommittee has the power to lead us down a better path. I am asking that my country acknowledge what has happened to me. The trauma. The pain. The loss. And I ask that survivors and descendants be given a chance to seek justice. Open the courtroom doors to us.

I believe we must acknowledge America's sins. It is the least we can do.

I saw what happened here on January 6th this year. It broke my heart. It reminded me of what happened 100 years ago. And now, I hear some of you on TV saying it didn't happen, like we didn't see it with our own eyes. It happened on live TV. 100 years ago, there was no TV, but you have me here right now. You see Mother Randle. You see my brother, Hughes Van Ellis. We lived this history. We can't ignore it. It lives with us.

We lost everything that day. Our homes. Our churches. Our newspapers. Our theaters. Our lives. Greenwood represented the best of what was possible for Black people in America – and for all people. No one cared about us for almost 100 years. We, and our history, have been forgotten, washed away. This Congress must recognize us, and our history. For Black Americans. For white Americans. For all Americans. That's some justice.

Thank you.